manitoba
advisory council
on the status
of women

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THE ECONOMIC REALITIES OF WOMEN

CONCERN & RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE
MANITOBA ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
TO THE GOVERNMENT OF MANITOBA

NOVEMBER, 1984

Economic hard times and fiscal restraint hit all of us hard - but they hit the poor hardest.

> "Women's poverty has a great deal to do with their family status. Women who are independent of male support - widows, single mothers, single women - run the greatest risk of living in poverty. Women who become widows are often left without adequate pensions; single parent women, who too frequently cannot collect maintenance payments, must often rely on income assistance; women whose sole source of support is from a wage are more often than not, working in low paying service or clerical jobs. These are all ongoing problems for women's economic well-being which have little to do with the current recession."[1]

There are three pertinent, interwoven areas where government must act decisively to rectify the blatant injustice and discrimination which has kept women poor. These areas are:

1) Mandatory Affirmative Action Policy and Programmes
2) Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value Legislation
3) Job Creation Strategies which incorporate the above.

Council wishes to make the point that as a matter of principle this statement to the Government of Manitoba will not contain the usual statistics, data or evidence to substantiate the recommendations we are making regarding Affirmative Action or Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value. With all due respect - the evidence is in; the jury appears to be out; Manitoba women are in the position of waiting for the verdict.

Before adding our voice to those from whom government has already heard on the issue of economic parity for women, Council determined to await the publication of one final report: Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report, Judge Rosalie Silverman Abella, Commissioner.

[1] Women and Economic Hard Times
A Joint Project of Women for Economic Survival and the University of Victoria Extension Division

Advisory Council recommends Judge Abella's Report to the Manitoba Government with one caveat. Abella concluded that the problem with quotas is that they become ceilings rather than floors and consequently rejected the concept. The position of this Council is that quotas are only ineffective when set too low.

Madame Justice Abella notes:

> "The members of the four designated groups represent about 60 percent of Canada's total population. They have a right, whatever the economic conditions, to compete equally for their fair share of employment opportunities. As it is, the recession has only intensified their long penalization in the form of undertraining, underemployment, underpayment, and outright exclusion from the labour force."

Abella accurately reflects the mood of those representatives of over 60 percent of the population with whom she consulted extensively, when she indicates that frustration over governmental inaction is running high because government intervention is required and has been eagerly anticipated much too long. The crux of the matter is now whether governments have the political will to act justly on behalf of over half the population.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Affirmative Action:

While the initiative for an Affirmative Action policy is commendable, there are concerns that this policy lacks teeth. We have not seen a mechanism whereby management is mandatorily accountable for results. This is a serious weakness.

The Manitoba Advisory Council therefore recommends:

A. That the Affirmative Action Co-ordinator be provided with fiscal and staff resources, in order to fulfill the objectives entrusted to him by government.

B. That the first priority of the Affirmative Action Co-ordinator's Office be the establishment of the accountability mechanism.

C. That it be mandatory that any company or organization doing business with the Manitoba Government be required to demonstrate that Affirmative Action measures are being implemented in the said company or organization. In other words, the principle of contract compliance must be applied.

2. Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value:

This government made an electoral promise to enact legislation regarding Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value.

The Manitoba Advisory Council on the Status of Women recommends:

A. That the Government of Manitoba proceed to introduce this legislation as a matter of highest priority.

B. That this legislation should be incorporated into the labour law of the province. The labour law review currently in process makes this most timely.

The Government of Manitoba in its First Report on the Jobs Fund has indicated that:

> "The keys to...growth lie in the private sector - the business and industries which can create new opportunities through expansion or through the development of new companies."

It is therefore crucial that Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value legislation should apply to both the public and private sectors.

C. Government, in the legislation, must establish a quasi-judicial body to guide and oversee implementation of Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value provision both in the public and private sectors.

This body would implicitly be responsible for monitoring and enforcement.

In recognition of the need for education regarding the private sector and this principle, Council recommends:

D. That while implementation commence with the public sector, a defined time framework must be incorporated to include the private sector. This time framework however, must not be ridiculously long in view of the serious economic penalties already imposed on women in the wage sector.

E. The principle of Contract Compliance must operate until economic justice renders this unnecessary.

3. Job Creation Strategies:

Council is aware that job creation strategies take time before results become obvious. Council has had a growing concern that the Jobs Fund, in tying job creation so closely to investment and economic development goals, may be having a negative impact on the employment needs of women. Recent data has indicated that women are entering non-traditional areas of employment and are consequently substantially improving their economic position. However, the data also shows that this improvement for women is largely negated by the effect of the disproportionate numbers of women continuing to enter traditional low-paying jobs, many of which are only available on a part-time basis without benefits or security. Women's unemployment rate is similar to that of men, and their underemployment is well documented.

Manitoba Advisory Council on the Status of Women is currently undertaking a study which through:

i) collecting and compiling statistics that describe women's attachment to the labour force, both in a historical and a current context;

ii) reviewing current labour market theories, and briefly describing and critiquing each one reviewed;

iii) constructing a framework for analyzing the Manitoba Jobs Fund in order to assess its impact on women;

we will be able to provide recommendations designed to offer the Manitoba Government creative strategies for effectively addressing the unemployment of women within the ongoing objectives and implementation of the Jobs Fund.